RE-CONCEPTUALISING "AUTONOMY" - INTERFACES, ALGORITHMS, AND NEW MACHINES

Roundtable

Organizer: Caja Thimm

The growing discourse on new autonomous machines, self-learning systems in data analysis and artificial intelligence, saw the reemergence of the term "autonomy". It is mainly used as a non-descript concept to attribute power to machines: robots, cars or social bots as "autonomous" agents, capable of learning on their own, surpassing the knowledge and power of individuals. The attribution of autonomy to these kinds of objects often contradicts the long history of the concept in social theory, philosophy or psychology. In more recent discourses, however, autonomy has been increasingly linked to the loss of human control over digital media and/or technological artifacts. Many of these processes are connected to a narrative which regards "autonomous agents" as being increasingly embedded in daily routines while diminishing individual autonomy. This line of argument necessitates a strong ethical reflection on these new agents.

The main claim of this roundtable is to open up new perspectives on this key term in recent technological development. Aim is to question the self-evident attribution of the term to digital technologies, while at the same time challenging some of the normative framings created in the discourse of machine ethics. We also want to reflect on the concept of autonomy as a means of social control for those with real power over 'autonomous' agents, such as companies, institutions or programmers. In order to do so, brief introductions will be given on the following topics:

(1) Caja Thimm: "Mediated Autonomy, social bots, and new machine ethics" (2) Regina Ring: "The interface as an autonomous system?" (3) Alexander Mierzwa: "Virtual

enhancement and the imagination of autonomy", (4) Thomas Bächle: "Algorithms and self-learning systems" (5) Patrick Nehls: "Platform autonomy and commercial power".